

Joint Statement by Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns
on the Second Meeting of the Afghanistan-U.S. Bilateral Commission
Kabul – 11 May 2013

At the invitation of Foreign Minister Dr. Zalmay Rassoul, Deputy Secretary William Burns and his delegation visited Kabul May 11, 2013, to convene the second meeting of the Afghanistan-U.S. Bilateral Commission, established by the Afghanistan-U.S. Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). In the meeting, both sides reviewed progress in implementing the SPA's shared vision of a secure, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan and discussed steps to strengthen our enduring partnership as sovereign nations. The United States and Afghanistan reaffirmed the role of the Strategic Partnership in consolidating the historic gains in Afghanistan made over the past decade and cementing the relationship through the security transition up to the end of 2014 and into the Transformation Decade of 2015-2024 that will follow. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns paid tribute to the shared enormous sacrifices of the Afghan nation, the United States, and the rest of the international community in the cause of a peaceful, secure, democratic, and prosperous Afghanistan.

Recognizing Progress in the Strategic Partnership

During today's session, Afghanistan and the United States reviewed the progress achieved since President Obama and President Karzai signed the SPA on May 2, 2012 in Kabul and since the October 3, 2012 Inaugural Bilateral Commission meeting hosted by Secretary Clinton in Washington, including consultations held by chairs of the commission working groups on the work plan. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns welcomed the following specific accomplishments:

- The transfer on March 25 of the Detention Facility in Parwan to Afghan sovereign control;
- The Independent Election Commission's announcement of a comprehensive elections timeline, including April 5, 2014 as the date for presidential and provincial council elections;
- The January 11 Joint Statement by President Obama and President Karzai in support of the possible opening of an office in Doha for the purpose of direct contacts and negotiations between the High Peace Council and authorized representatives of the Taliban;
- The efforts made during the April 29, 2013 Istanbul Process Conference in Almaty to promote confidence and result-oriented cooperation in the Heart

of Asia region, greatly contributing to peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan and the broader region;

- Progress made by Afghanistan and the International Community toward meeting the goals of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, which will be reviewed at the July 3, 2013 Senior Officials Meeting in Kabul;
- The United States' commitment in January to increasingly place funding for major electrical infrastructure projects on the Afghan Government budget in line with the commitment to channel 50 percent of development assistance through the Afghan Government.
- The advancement of the Security Transition process, as evidenced by nearly 90 percent of Afghan men and women living in areas where the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have the lead in security;
- The outline of the U.S. contribution to the NATO-led Train, Advise, and Assist mission as part of our enduring commitment to strengthen the ANSF as it takes on growing responsibility;
- Official negotiations over a Bilateral Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement as agreed in the Strategic Partnership Agreement, to provide a framework for our future security and defense cooperation, including to facilitate training, sustaining, and equipping the ANSF, to continue counterterrorism efforts to defeat al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and to clarify the scope, nature, and related obligations of both countries with regards to a possible United States military presence in Afghanistan post-2014.

Charting the Way Forward

In order to strengthen our partnership based on our shared interests as memorialized in the SPA, Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns emphasized the continued convergence of interests and vision as we move through security transition in 2014 and into the Transformation Decade and decided on concrete steps to take in the coming months.

In preparation for Afghanistan's historic democratic transition in 2014, Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul reviewed preparations for credible, inclusive, and transparent elections. Both sides recognized that independent Afghan institutions are essential to electoral credibility as are stakeholders such as civil society and women's groups in the democratic process. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul reiterated the Afghan Government's strong determination to undertake all that is necessary for the holding of credible elections in 2014. Afghanistan also committed to accelerate elections security planning – with support from the international community – to improve access to polls for all eligible voters,

including efforts to facilitate voting by women. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns underlined the importance of these elections being free from any external interference.

Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen democratic governance, including respect for human rights, the rule of law, and the rights of women under the Afghan Constitution. The United States and Afghanistan underscored the ongoing commitment to supporting the rights of Afghan women and girls and encouraged the further development of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, as well as strengthened implementation of laws protecting women and girls. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns reiterated the continued need for an inclusive political process of negotiations with the armed opposition, including the Taliban, that maintains the rights enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

To help Afghanistan sustain the economic gains of the last 12 years, Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns pledged to make progress toward specific Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework milestones by the July 3, 2013 Senior Officials Meeting in Kabul. Both countries remain committed to accelerating Afghanistan's economic integration within its region as a means to bolster job creation, economic growth, and regional stability. The Afghan Government, with the United States as a supporting country, is working to implement Istanbul Process Confidence-Building Measure Implementation Plans on "Trade, Commerce, and Investment" and "Regional Infrastructure."

Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns emphasized the importance of the upcoming Milestone 2013 and the announcement of the fifth and final tranche of security transition, which marks ISAF's shift from a combat to an advisory and support mission, placing the ANSF in full operational lead across Afghanistan. This realizes the commitment made at the May 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago and reaffirmed by President Obama and President Karzai during their January 2013 meeting in Washington. The United States and Afghanistan recognized the increased capabilities, effectiveness, and bravery of Afghan National Security Forces as they take on greater responsibility. The United States reaffirmed its commitment to continue training, advising, and assisting Afghan forces under the Bilateral Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement currently under negotiation. Afghanistan and the United States recognize the importance of strengthening accountability mechanisms to further build the effectiveness of, and public support for, Afghan National Security Forces. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns affirmed that both sides should intensify efforts to conclude the Bilateral Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement negotiations as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns reaffirmed our resolve in the SPA to further advance the Afghan people's desire for a sovereign, unified and democratic Afghanistan, governed on the basis of the Afghan Constitution, including respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic values. Cooperation between Afghanistan and the United States continues to be based on mutual respect and shared interests. Foreign Minister Dr. Rassoul and Deputy Secretary Burns recommitted to continue these high level bilateral consultations to further deepen our partnership on the basis of the Strategic Partnership Agreement.